

**Caloosahatchee River**  
**Interagency Coordination Meetings and Stakeholder Engagement Process**  
**Guidelines**  
21 April 2014

**I. Objective and Scope**

Develop shared prioritization and support leading to action among local and state governments and stakeholders for specific projects that will benefit the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary, including those identified in the Caloosahatchee River Watershed Protection Plan (CRWPP), the Basin Management Action Plan, and other plans. The intent is to draw on a realistic, achievable and fundable set of short term (less than 5 years) and medium term (5 to 10 years) concrete steps that can contribute to improving the Caloosahatchee River's health related to both water quality and quantity.

**II. Constraints and Opportunities of the Process**

The Caloosahatchee River, estuary, and watershed are significantly challenged by both water quantity and quality issues. Furthermore, it is a complex estuarine and upstream freshwater system. Its health is dependent on a much larger, regional, significantly altered ecosystem involving watersheds north of Lake Okeechobee, the Lake itself, the Everglades Agricultural Area, numerous canals and water diversions and uses, and the Everglades itself. Consequently, there are numerous constraints and limits on how much can be improved, and at what speed. There are rules and regulations, legal obligations, multiple users and jurisdictions, and more constrained budgets in recent times. Though this process will not be able to address and overcome all such constraints, it may identify, better understand, and recognize such constraints.

That said, an effective prioritization process will yield many meaningful benefits. It can improve coordination among the various state and local agencies as well as engage stakeholders. It can generate a prioritized and politically-supportable list of short and mid-term actions that can positively affect the River's health. It can galvanize stakeholder support for the resources needed to implement key prioritized projects. It can demonstrate to interested parties the potential to realize meaningful improvements when parties work together. And it can create a platform for future cooperation and coordination.

**III. Participation**

Given the intent of this process and consistent with the coordinating agencies identified in the initial Caloosahatchee Watershed Protection Plan legislation, inter-agency participants in this process will include the agencies listed just below. The intent of the

process is to engage both technical and policy staff, along with decision makers, to advance prioritized projects to the greatest extent possible.

- Florida Department of Agriculture and Conservation Services (DACS)
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
- Lee County
- South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)

There are also many other entities and individuals who have an interest in and should contribute to the prioritization process. Accordingly, the process will incorporate meetings with additional government entities, open stakeholder forums and ongoing outreach to interested stakeholders to ensure that efforts are transparent and informed by diverse perspectives. Participants in these stakeholder forums and outreach efforts will include, but not be limited to:

- Other county and local governments
- Environmental and conservation NGOs
- Agricultural interests
- Tourism and real estate interests
- Other Federal and State agencies
- Academic institutions
- The general public

#### **IV. Meetings, Frequency, and Locations**

The process will include the following meetings:

- Approximately monthly meetings of state and local agencies, for between 6 to 9 months, with meetings held primarily in the greater Ft. Myers area;
- Meetings, as necessary, with other local and county governments;
- At least two meetings of the Stakeholder Forum for stakeholder and public engagement, at the beginning and toward the end of the CI's work; and,
- Ongoing outreach, as needed, to others with specific expertise needed to inform the interagency efforts.

#### **V. Process**

The facilitators will work with the agencies and stakeholders to develop the following.

- A. Agenda:** The facilitator will work with the parties to develop constructive, focused agendas for meetings. These agendas will be sent at least five (5) days ahead of each meeting for interagency meetings and for forums.

- B. **Meeting Materials.** A number of supporting materials (e.g., candidate projects, prioritization criteria, etc.) will be needed to inform deliberations. The facilitator will work with agencies and stakeholders to orchestrate development of needed work projects.
- C. **Meeting Summaries:** The facilitator will prepare meeting summaries of each meeting. Upon completion, the facilitator will seek input from participants on the accuracy and content of the summaries, and after receiving comment, will incorporate these to the best of their ability and finalize the summaries. All summaries are the sole product of the facilitators and any errors and omissions will be the sole responsibility of the facilitator.
- D. **Posting of Materials:** CBI will utilize its existing website to post meeting materials, including meeting agendas, meeting summaries, and any other pertinent information. Materials will be posted on a Caloosahatchee River section of the SFWMD website.
- E. **Role of the Media.** Stakeholder Forums are open to any interested member of the public and the media. “Media” for these purposes includes: print, television and radio; websites; and any other public information distribution mechanism.
- F. **Facilitation.** All meetings will be facilitated. The facilitators may use any number of techniques to help ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak, that comments are kept to a reasonable length of time, and that subjects under discussion are provided sufficient time and focus for progress.

## VI. Participant Responsibilities

Participant responsibilities and expectations include the following.

- A. Participants in this effort will strive to focus on the objectives outlined above.
- B. Participants will seek to identify not only problems, but also solutions.
- C. Participants will work in a constructive and problem solving manner.
- D. Participants will stay on track with the work plan and agenda.
- E. Participants will seek, to the extent possible, to participate in the process in its entirety to help ensure continuity, clarity, and relationship building.
- F. Participants will seek to prepare ahead of meetings and to organize comments and ideas ahead of time to ensure focused, productive meetings.
- G. Participants recognize the complex, interconnected Everglades system while not seeking to tackle system-wide changes through this dialogue that would require numerous other actors to address.

## **VII. Facilitator Responsibilities**

The facilitators are responsible for ensuring that the process runs smoothly, to develop meeting agendas, prepare and distribute draft and final meeting summaries, and helping the parties identify interests, options, and ideas for identifying, evaluating, prioritizing, recommending, and creating action on key projects.

The facilitators will abide by the Ethical Standards of the Association of Conflict Resolution. In part, these standards require that: “The neutral must maintain impartiality toward all parties. Impartiality means freedom from favoritism or bias either by word or by action and a commitment to serve all parties as opposed to a single party.” The facilitators will be available to consult confidentially with participants during or between meetings. Facilitators, if asked, are required to hold confidences even if that means withholding information that the facilitators would prefer to be made available to the full group. Confidentiality protections do not extend to threats or reports of criminal action.

## **VIII. Process Duration and Termination**

The process is expected to begin in April 2014 and conclude on or before 1 December 2014.